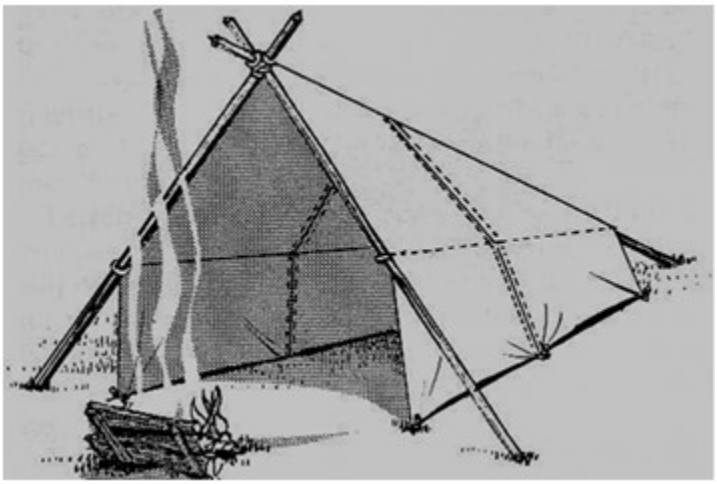
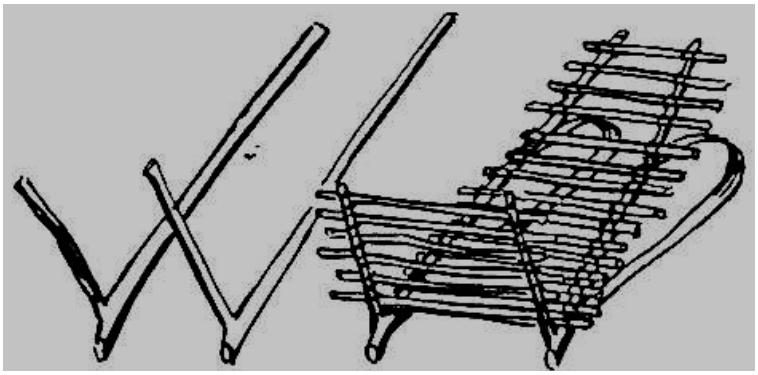
A Long-Term Survival Guide – Improvised Tents, Packs, & Sleeping Bags:

For long-term survival, you need a way to deal with unexpected challenges, such as losing your equipment, or not having enough gear to supply all of the friends and family that may ask you for help, during a long-term crisis. One solution is to make improvised gear, from available materials. Improvised equipment is inferior to modern gear, but it is much better than not having any gear.



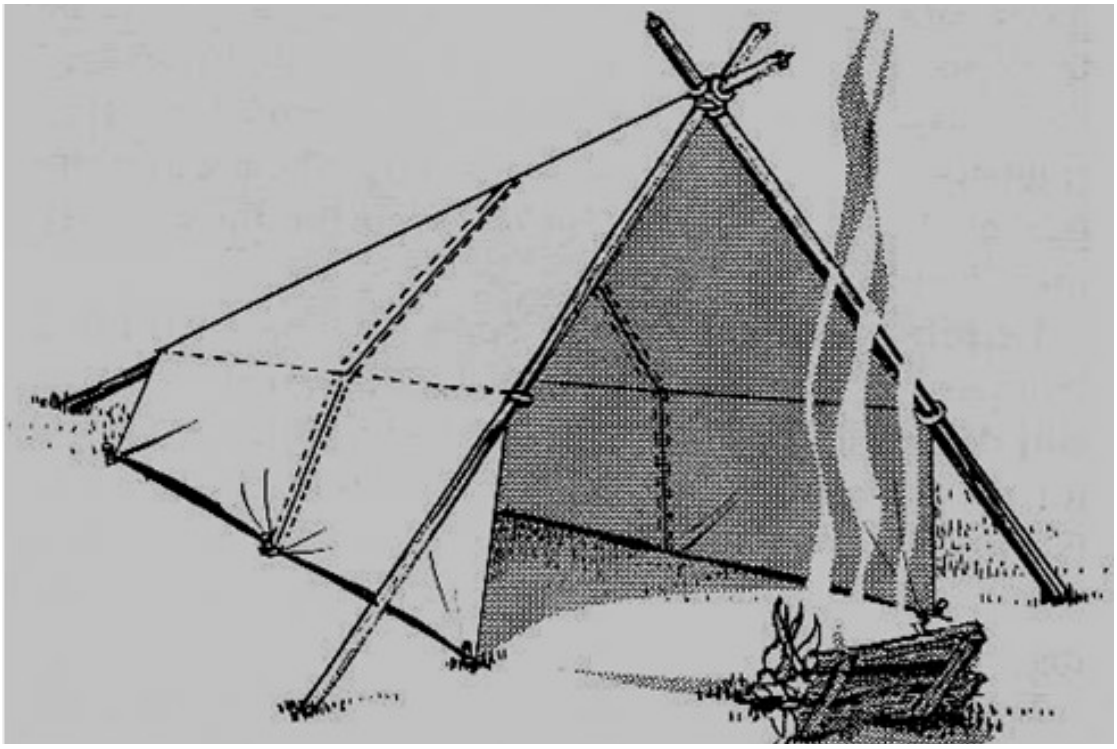
The Forester Tent is a simple shelter design, supported by three poles.

Anyone can make improvised survival gear, once you've seen a few examples, to get the ideas across. So here are some designs for basic tents, packs and sleeping bags, which you can make from modern materials (if available), but which can also be made from animal skins and furs.

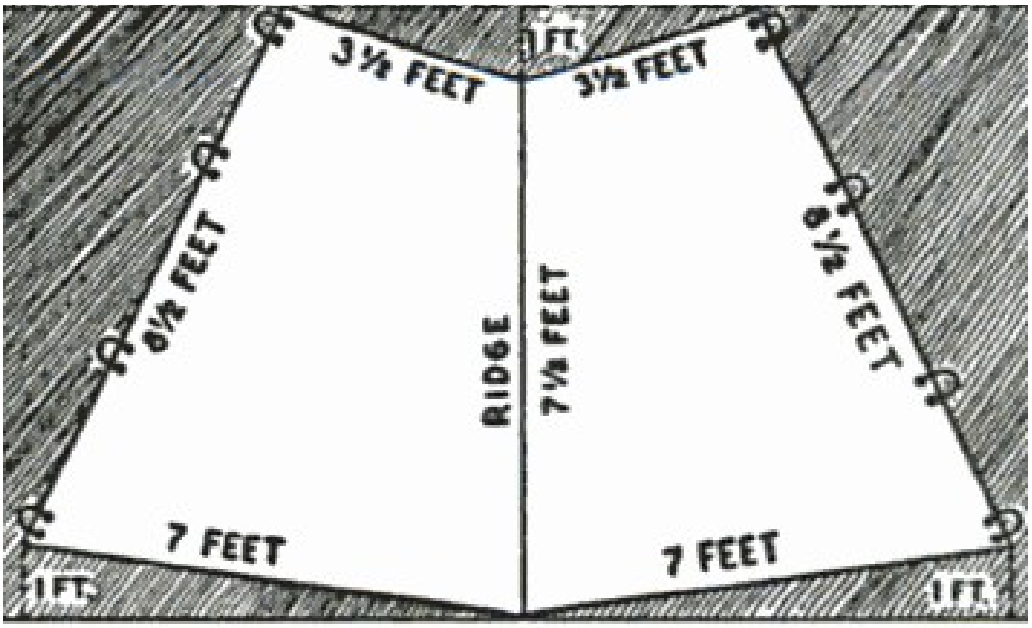


Simple pack frames, made with sticks, lashings, and braided straps, are effective load haulers.

These simple designs are merely suggestions, to help you decide what to make with the materials you have available. Feel free to modify the plans in any way that you might prefer. Don't worry if your gear looks rough and crude; as long as it does the intended job, appearance is unimportant.

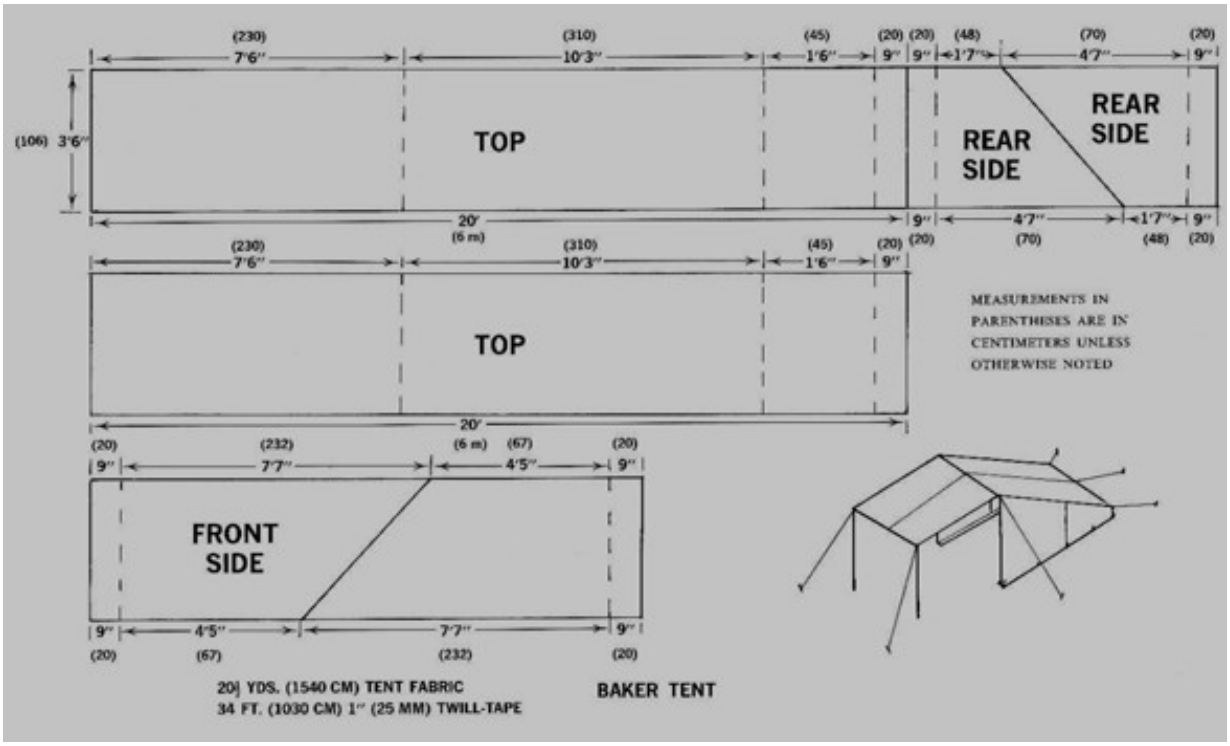


Forester Tent: The forester tent is one of the easiest tent-style shelters to make yourself. This tent has an open front, and is designed to be heated by a small fire in front, so it is comfortable even in cold weather. The "cloth" of the tent can be made from a plastic or nylon tarp, canvas, or it can be stitched together from animal hides. This design could be improved by adding a floor, and some mosquito netting, but it is best as a simple open survival shelter. The support poles can be carried with the tent, or left behind and replaced at every new campsite.

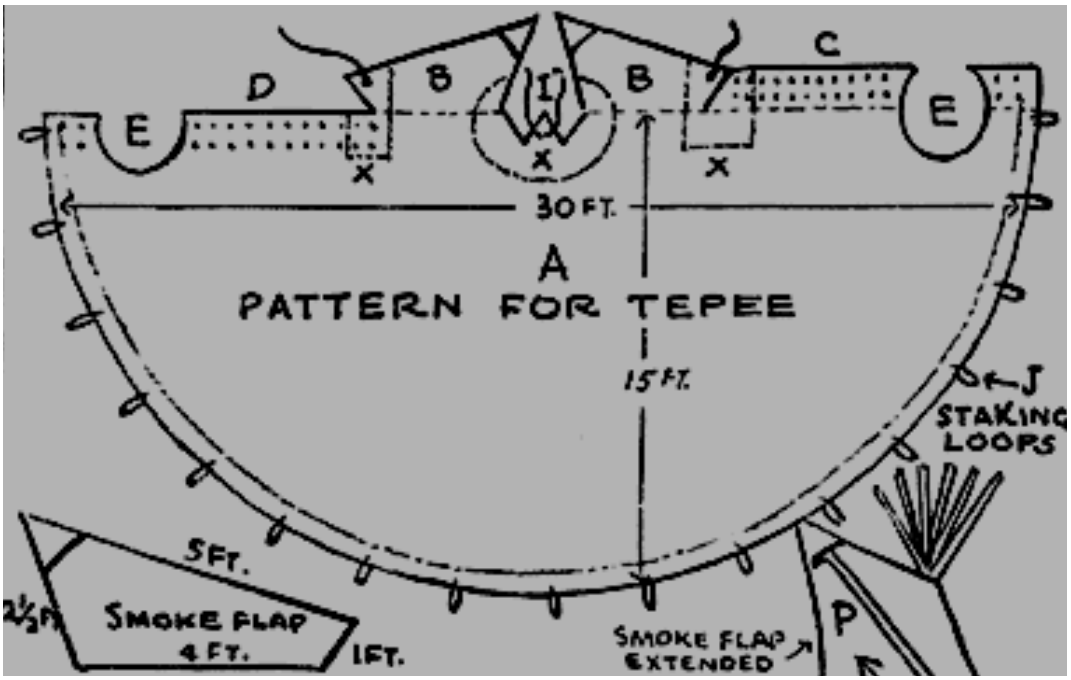


The pattern for a forester tent is a simple modified rectangle, so it is easily made from a tarp.

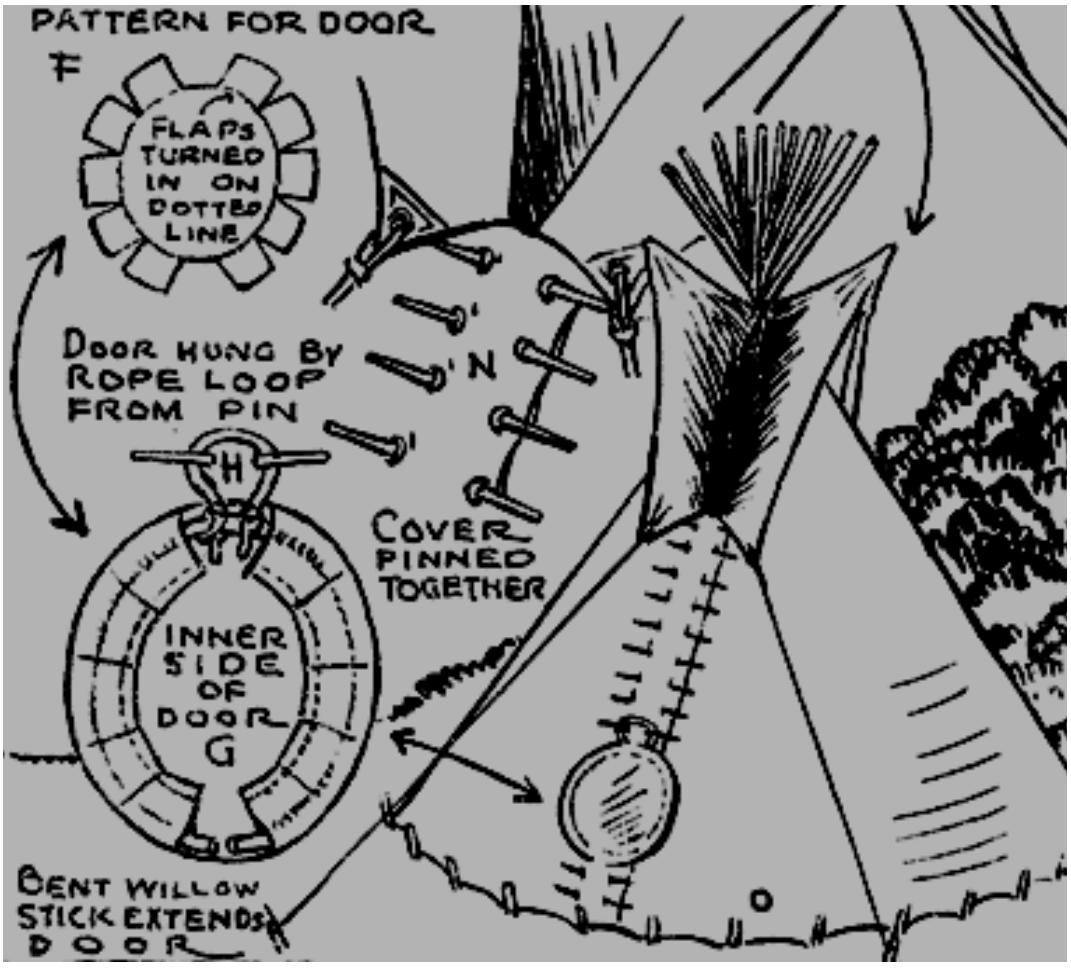
Baker Tent: The baker tent is another simple shelter design, an open-front tent with an awning. This design is also intended for use with a campfire, for radiant heating. The awning works as a sun shade and rain cover, and it can also be dropped to cover the front of the tent, for privacy.

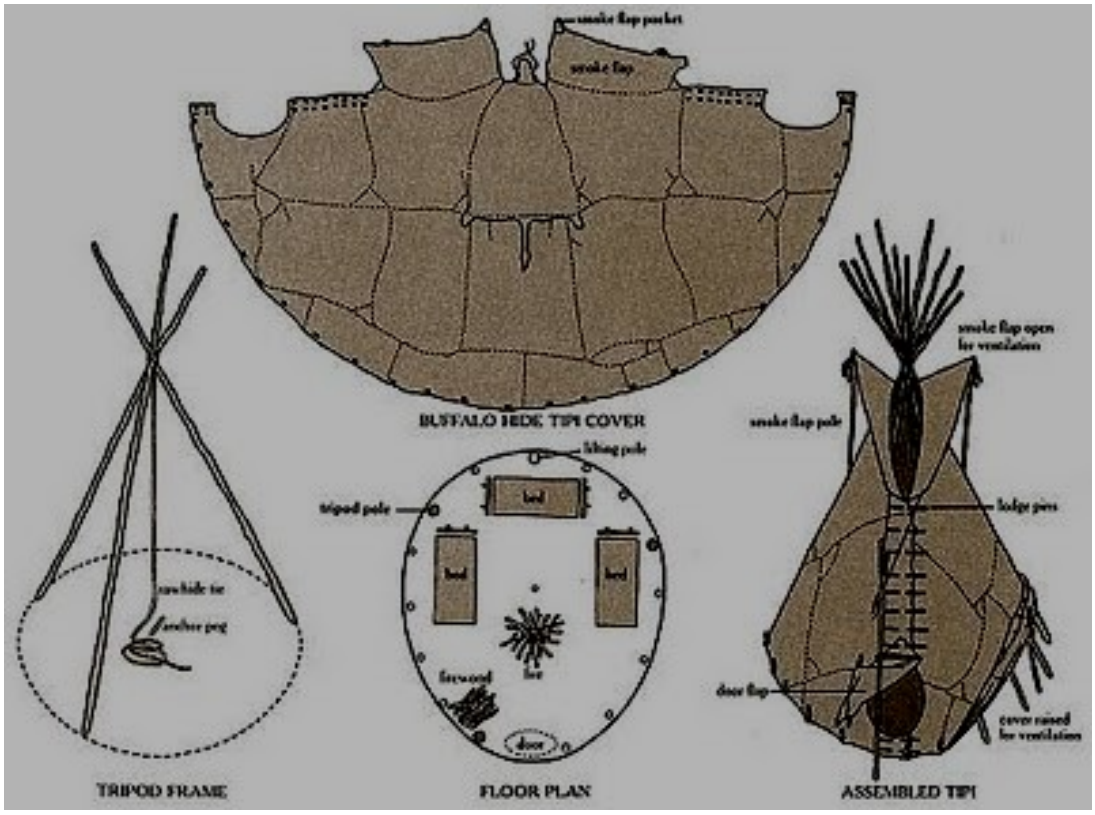


A baker tent requires more material than a forester tent, but the awning doubles as a front door.

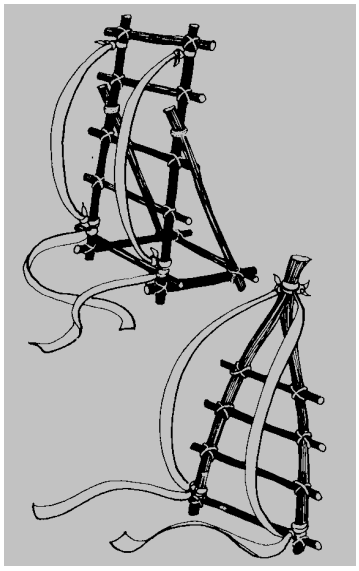


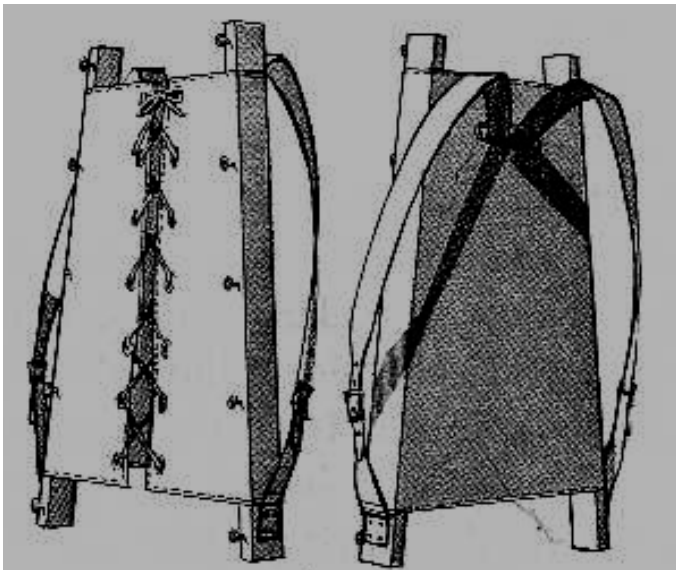
Teepee: The teepee is a fully-enclosed shelter, that allows you to have an inside fire.



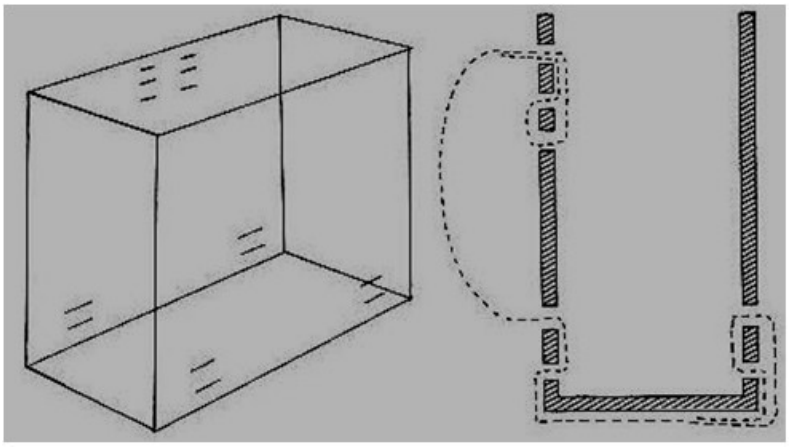


This sketch shows how a teepee pattern can be stitched together from animal hides. While a teepee requires more material than a forester or baker tent, the inside fire and full enclosure make for an excellent improvised shelter. The main drawback to teepees, is the large number of poles needed.

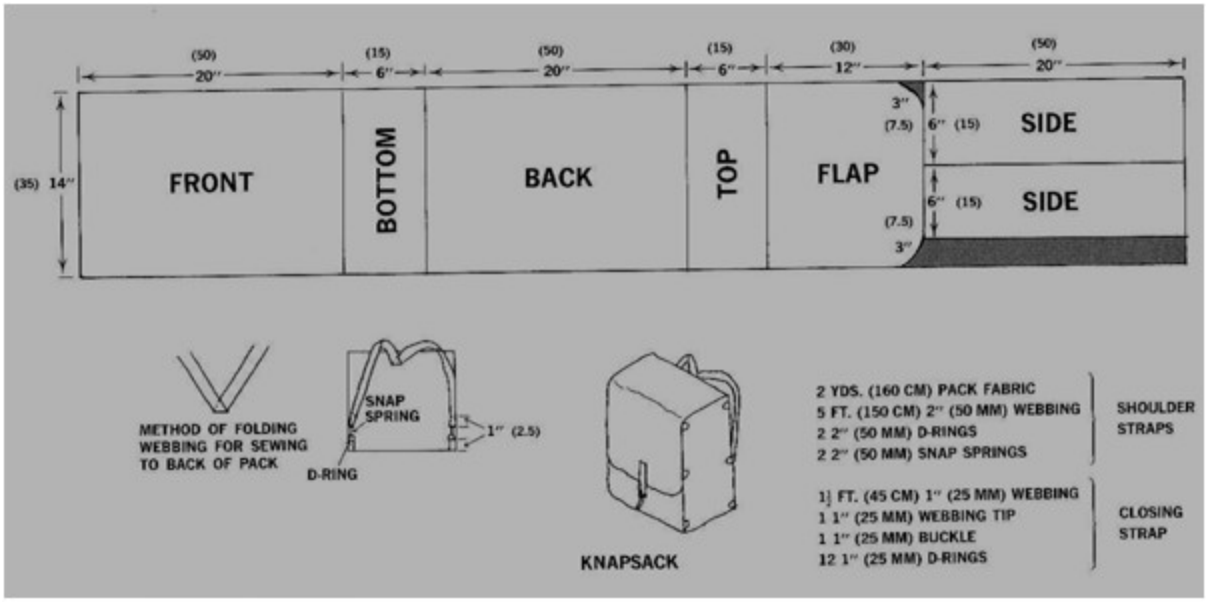




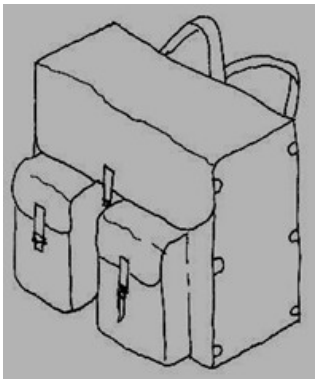
Packs: The simplest packs are pack-frames, made by lashing sticks together with improvised cordage, and braiding pack straps from more cordage. Cargo is wrapped in cloth, or an animal hide, then lashed to the frame. Another design is the Alaskan packboard, which is made from canvas or a hide laced over a stick or lumber framework. Cargo is also lashed onto this pack.

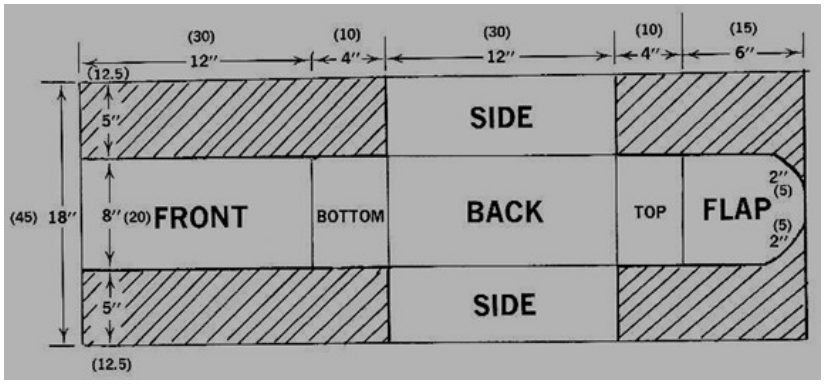


Pack Baskets: Another way to make a pack is by weaving a basket, and adding pack straps. Pack baskets can also be made from items such as plastic trash cans, by adding straps, as shown here.



Knapsack: Here is a basic pattern for a modern knapsack, which can have extra pockets added, using the pocket pattern shown below. These packs can be made from canvas or animal hides.





Sleeping Bags: The simplest sleeping bag is not a sleeping bag at all, but a bedroll. Bedrolls are layered sleeping sacks, usually made with a waterproof outer cover, a foam sleeping pad, one or more wool blankets, a sheet, and a pillow, if desired.

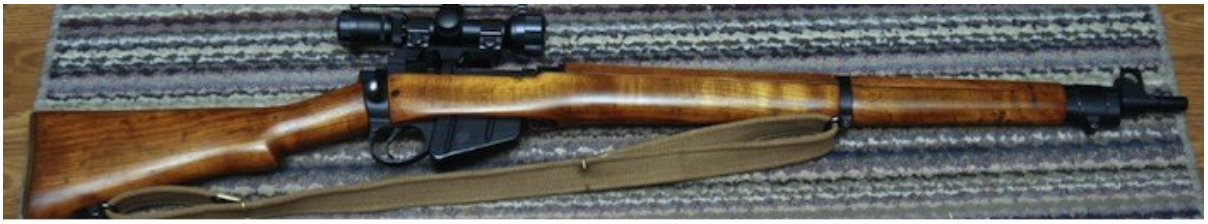
You can buy canvas bedroll covers from outdoor outfitters, but it is easy to make your own. One example would be to take a plastic 8 x 10 foot tarp (camo pattern), and lay it out flat. Put the foam sleeping pad on the tarp. Put a wool blanket on the foam pad, and than a sheet on the wool blanket. Fold the blanket and sheet in half lengthwise, to make a sleeping bag shape on top of the foam pad. Fold the bottom 2 or 3 feet of the tarp up over the blanket, then fold the left side of the tarp over the blanket, then the right side, and you have a basic bedroll. For cold weather, you can add more blankets. For storage, you start at the bottom, and roll everything into a large tube, then tie it shut.

Camo tarps make good waterproof bedroll covers, and come in desert and woodland colors.

Closed-cell foam sleeping pads are a good item to add to your bedroll.

Bedrolls were originally used to hold more than bedding. Often a rifle was rolled up in the bedroll, to use it as a padded carrying case, and bedrolls were also packed with items like spare clothing, a bag of dried trail foods, and the early equivalent of a survival kit: a spare knife, and flint-and-steel. Some of these bedrolls could weigh as much as a full backpack (up to 30 pounds), but they were often the only camping gear available. If you make a bedroll, you could use it for storage, as well.

I like quilted moving pads, like this example. They make a warm extra layer, for your bedroll.

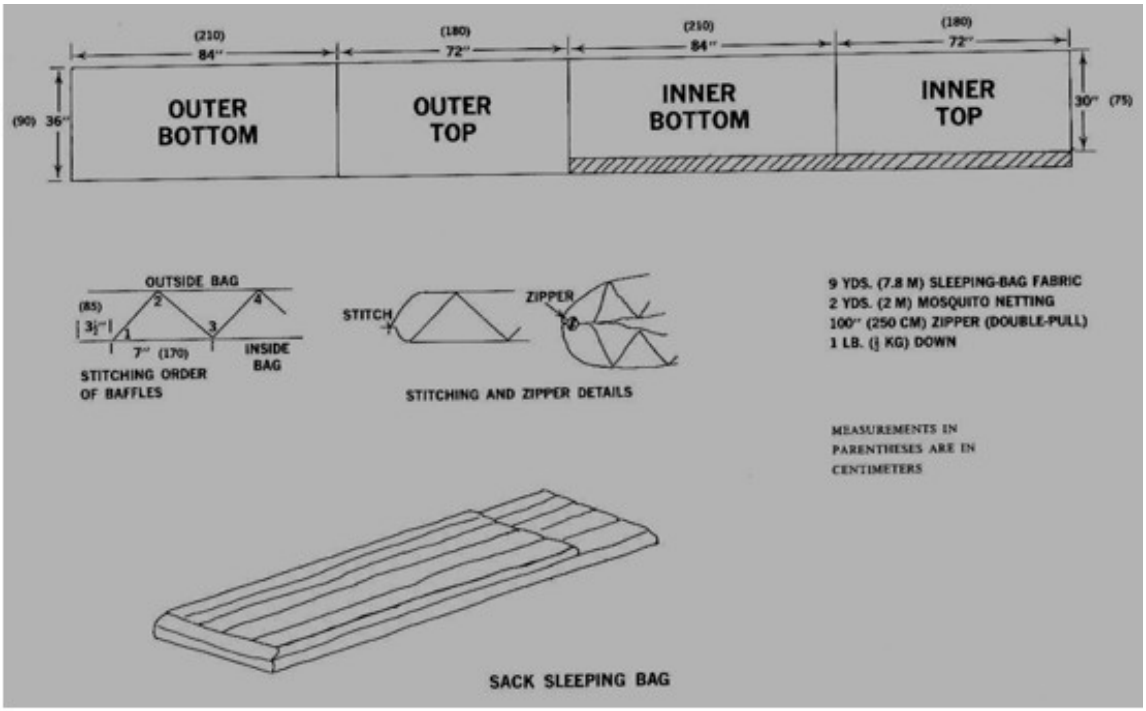


A bedroll makes a good improvised padded carrying case, for your rifle.

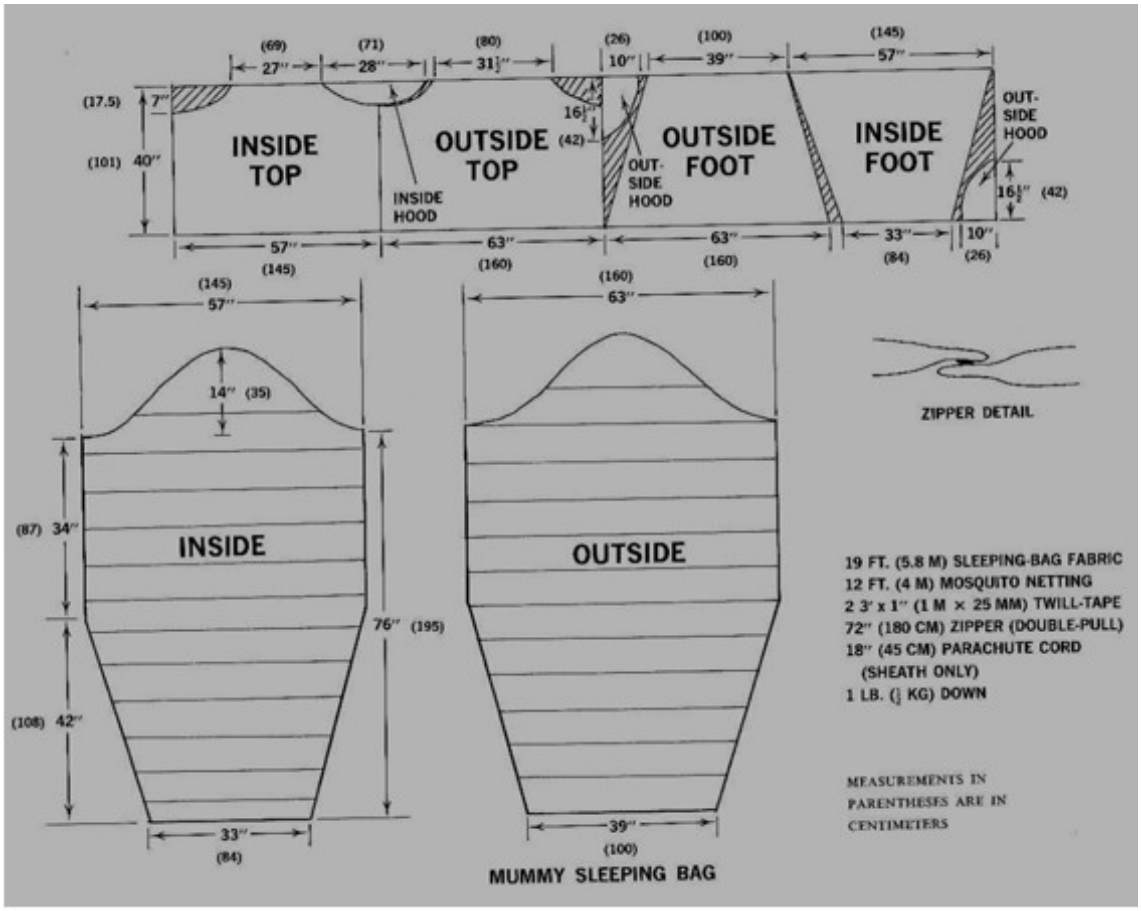
You can make bedrolls from animal skins, like these deer hides, in a long-term survival crisis.

Larger animal pelts, such as these buffalo hides, make excellent bedroll furs.

Bear skins make good bedroll layers, and a single moose pelt is large enough to make into a tent.

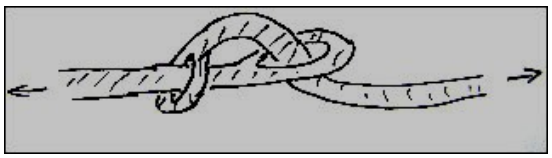


If you want an actual sleeping bag, but can't buy one, you can make them using these patterns.



Rabbit Skin Blanket: Here is how to make an improvised blanket from rabbit furs. It requires a minimum of 50 rabbit pelts to make one small blanket. The finished blanket is light-weight, but very warm and soft. First, take each rabbit fur, and cut it into a long spiral strip, as shown here.

Tie one end of the first fur to something that you will wind it onto (a spindle). We used a 2 foot long section of a 2 inch diameter branch. Attach your spindle to something heavy, to hold it tight, such as tying the spindle branch to a sturdy stake. Now take each fur strip, and fold it in half along its entire length (fur side out), a little at a time, and twist the folded portion of the strip, until the entire strip is twisted, and wind it onto the spindle.



When you get to the end of the first strip, join it to the next strip, by cutting a small 3/4 inch slit in both ends of each strip of fur, one inch from the ends of the strip. Slip one end of the untwisted strip of fur into the slit through the twisted strip of fur. Pull the untwisted strip through its own slit and pull tight. This will lock the two strips together, as shown above.

Continue joining and twisting your furs until all of the furs are wound onto the spindle stick. Now build a frame out of 2 inch diameter branches, that is at least 4 feet by 6 feet. Use strong cordage to lash each corner of the frame. Attach one end of the twisted and joined furs to one corner of your frame. Wrap the twisted furs around and around the two shorter sides of the frame, until all of the furs are wound onto the frame.

Now starting at the bottom of the frame, using cordage, twine the fur strips together every 1 and one half inches from left to right. Starting from the left hand side of the frame, tie the middle of this cordage onto the first strip of fur. Then twist the cordage once around itself on the other side of the first strip. Then weave in and out of each fur wrapping the cordage around itself before and after each strip of fur, as shown above.

Tie off the cordage ends to the fur strip at the far side of the frame. Now repeat every 1.5 inches, with a new cord, until you reach the top. This twining is very important. If you were to simply weave the cordage it would not stay put nor would it hold the strips in a uniform twisted shape. Compared to a wool blanket, a rabbit blanket is surprisingly warm: being about 1" thick, rather than a wool blanket which is quite thin. Now you know what to do with all the furs, from those critters you caught in your den traps. Once you have made a fur blanket, you can try making a fur sleeping bag. For a fun survival project, it’s hard to beat making stuff out of dead bunnies!

Post-Collapse Survival Scrounging: Abandoned vehicles are excellent sources of materials, for making improvised tents, packs, and sleeping bags. Cars and trucks usually have a lot of strapping in them, in the form of seat belts. This nylon webbing makes great straps for backpacks, and for securing your rolled-up bedroll. Trucks often have large amounts of tie-down straps, and flat-beds may have enough tarps to outfit your entire group with tents. Straps and tarps can also be used to make harness for pack and draft animals, and to make covers for improvised covered wagons.

Abandoned vehicles should always be searched for useful items and materials.

Seatbelt material, scrounged from abandoned cars and trucks, has many survival uses.

An abandoned semi may have enough tarps and straps to outfit your whole group with gear.